

# Inspection report for Darlaston Sure Start Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Walsall
<b>Inspection number</b>	383914
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 May 2012
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<b>Centre leader</b>	Angela Clarke
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	EY338475 Darlaston Children's Centre Nursery

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

## Information about the centre

Spurgeons manages services at Darlaston Children's Centre on behalf of SERCO and reports directly to the local authority. The centre has an advisory board and membership is drawn from a wide range of partners including health services, the elected ward councillor, together with centre users and local schools. The centre's staff team consists of a service manager, a leadership team, family support and outreach workers, early years practitioners and an administration team.

Darlaston Children's Centre was designated as a phase six children's centre as part of the Sure Start Local Programme in June 2003 and received 'children's centre' status in April 2005. It is one of 18 centres in the Walsall area. It serves an extensive urban population but families attend from across the whole borough. The majority of families live within the 30% most deprived areas in the country with 27% living within the most deprived 20% areas.

The centre is located at Ilmington House in the old centre of Darlaston town. The centre has been purposely designed to offer multi-agency office and community development space and includes a 36 place nursery and a community café.

Much of the centre's provision is planned in partnership with community partners to maximise services for families. The proportion of families who claim benefits or are workless among the adult population around 23% and 50% of adults have no formal qualifications. Some families in the local area experience significant levels of poverty, high levels of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and low levels of adult

literacy and numeracy. At 75%, the large majority of 0–15 year olds and 70% of 0–4 year olds are of White British heritage. The remainder represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds but few are new to speaking English, although there is a rise in the number of Eastern European families who have limited English speaking skills.

Within the reach area, there are 1,420 children who are under five years of age. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below the levels expected for their age.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

**3**

## Main findings

Darlaston is a satisfactory children's centre. It provides an inclusive, warm and welcoming environment. Governance arrangements are satisfactory. Over the last year, the development of the centre stalled and standards in the provision of services declined. Appropriate action has been taken this year to address the issues of underperformance, including the appointment of a new senior leadership team and centre manager. After this period of significant change the centre is now re-establishing its profile within the community. The advisory board has been refreshed to include parent representatives and meetings take place regularly. The board shares the ambition and drive of the senior leaders in the centre but its role in scrutinising and challenging the work of the centre has yet to have full impact. Health representation on the board has been limited because of delays in communicating timings of meetings.

The recently appointed senior leadership team is skilled and knowledgeable. It shares a clear vision and commitment to develop the centre's services and is supported by a dedicated team which aspires to serve its community well. Staff morale is good and they are working well towards achieving the centre's mission of, 'Making Darlaston and Moxley better for children, parents and communities.' Parents are great advocates of the centre. One parent commented, 'There is a real buzz about the place now.' Most outcomes for children and their families, although satisfactory overall, are generally beginning to improve. However, health outcomes

are worse in the Darlaston area than seen nationally. Indicators show poor child health, with a relatively high proportion of babies born with low birth weights, high levels of childhood obesity and low take-up of breastfeeding.

Staying safe is a particular strength. Centre staff safeguard and protect families and enable them to develop behaviour which promotes their safety and the safety of their children. For instance, parents attend paediatric first-aid courses so that they are able to respond appropriately if their children are injured. Those families made vulnerable by their circumstances are well supported by experienced staff.

Comments from users such as, 'Staff are great', and 'everyone is so welcoming', are typical. However, not enough families within the reach, particularly those with children with disabilities and special needs, engage with the centre's services.

The bright, welcoming and friendly environment provides a safe place where families enjoy the activities on offer. Plans to extend adult education and children's learning and development opportunities are not yet fully realised. Currently activities available are limited to a relatively few participants. As a result, many families are making slow progress towards realising their learning ambitions.

Despite senior leaders' work to market the centre not all families in the area are aware of how they can access services and activities and as a result the needs of some target groups, and in particular those most in need, are not yet being fully assessed. As one commented, 'The family support has been brilliant'; another said, 'Staff really get to know the families; it's not just a job to them!'

The centre's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. This is because although robust leadership and evaluation systems are beginning to drive improvements at the centre, they are not yet sufficiently embedded.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve outcomes related to health, and especially those linked to obesity and breastfeeding, by setting clear and measurable targets so that the centre can evaluate the impact of its work more rigorously, increasing the take-up of more healthy lifestyles by families across target groups, and by strengthening the participation of health professionals on the advisory board.
- Increase the participation of families through more effective promotion of the centre's work, activities and services, and by more effective identification and targeting of those families most in need, including those with children with disabilities and special needs.
- Provide a wider range of regular community learning activities to engage a significantly increased number of adults in services and opportunities that help them build qualifications through training and education in order to seek paid

employment and secure their future economic well-being.

## How good are outcomes for families?

3

There is a range of positive health initiatives in place and at the point of implementation to support the improved health of children and families. For instance, the Area Family Support Team, a multi-agency approach, is targeting particularly vulnerable families and those identified as in greatest need. However, the impact of these has yet to be realised. Breastfeeding take-up rates are at around 23% and child obesity in Reception Year is 13.3%. There is little evidence of an improving picture at this time. As a result, health outcomes are inadequate with little evidence available of positive improvement as yet.

Good procedures are in place to ensure that children are safeguarded. Staff have secure knowledge, are well trained and adopt very safe practices. They work effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children and families. Those on child protection plans are very well supported. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF), where required, is implemented effectively. Those parents who made their views known say they and their families feel very safe at the centre. First-aid courses and participation in a range of safety campaigns such as 'Child safety week' and home safety risk assessments help raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities.

Children who attend the centre's nursery provision make good progress from their starting points during the Early Years Foundation Stage. Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the reach area varies in quality ranging from broadly satisfactory to outstanding, although outstanding provision in the area is rare. The majority of provision is satisfactory overall. The percentage of children living in the reach area achieving at least 78 scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) is well below the national average at 52%. However, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest increased has decreased year-on-year over several years although it has levelled out this year. The centre's increasing links and joint working with schools help some children to prepare confidently for full-time education and ensure regular attendance.

Parenting and nurturing programmes are limited but popular with families and are leading to significant gains in parenting confidence and skills, which is having a positive impact on children's behaviour. The 'stay and play' sessions provide valuable opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together. A few parents make highly prized contributions to the life of the centre as volunteers and most contribute to the evaluation of activities. They also play a part in the governance of the centre as members of the advisory board.

The centre's own data show that there are too few adults using the centre who are involved in learning activities. The few volunteers at the centre are provided with training opportunities and are well supported to develop their confidence, skills and

attitudes to support them on pathways to employment. There is some evidence that the economic well-being of families is improving because of some quality learning activities and workshops, for example one on setting up your own business. One parent now runs the community café which is at the heart of the centre. The café provides a vital meeting place where friends are made, isolation is overcome, and where families can socialise and enjoy a healthy lunch. In addition, the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau and the welfare rights workers, both much valued partners, is supporting families to maximise their incomes by ensuring they claim benefits to which they are entitled.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**3**

The quality and range of services offered are adequate and the centre meets the needs of some of the target groups. This is particularly evident in the case of those identified as in most need of intervention, for example those without any state benefits who identify they can turn to the staff for support. However, although improving, as yet not enough families living in the community are accessing the centre.

Care, guidance and support are good, particularly from family support workers who provide vital assistance that helps families improve their lives. Parents expressed appreciation for the support they receive and the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. Case studies show how staff help them through difficult times and how their lives would be very different without the centre's help. The centre is increasing its support for new families moving into the area, for example to those from Eastern European backgrounds, but has yet to engage with the majority of parents whose children have disabilities or special educational needs.

Teenage parents receive targeted and effective support within the centre. Through nurturing and health related activities, they are being empowered and developing

positive self-esteem and good levels of confidence in their parenting. Families made vulnerable by their circumstances are prioritised for premium provision, for example nursery funding for two-year-olds and take-up is growing. Families using the centre say they feel their needs are met very well. The use of tried and tested assessments, such as the Common Assessment Framework, family reviews, and Early Years Foundation Stage assessments, are effective and ensure that services and interventions are planned effectively and improve outcomes. Families who are in receipt of intensive support are consistently encouraged and supported to contribute to the process of assessment and reviews of their achievements. Effective links with health and social care services help families to access information and services quickly and result in their positive safeguarding and early interventions to promote the well-being of children and families.

The early years advisory teacher supports staff well to drive improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Speech and language support within the nursery and from speech specialists across the reach area is beginning to have a positive impact on children's communication and language development. Several parents spoke of the positive support and encouragement they have received at the centre which have enabled them to progress on their career pathways. The effective range of learning and development opportunities provided in previous years has gradually decreased in availability. The new senior leadership team is working with adult education partners to build these up again and improve access to accredited training but these plans have yet to be fully implemented.

These are the grades for the quality of provision.

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The governance and accountability of the centre are satisfactory. Leaders at all levels demonstrate they have the drive, ambition and expertise to make necessary improvements and pursue high aspirations for the community. According to one advisory board member, since the appointment of the senior leadership team, 'We have a vision and we are working towards it.' Parents talk with high regard for the centre leader. One parent said, 'She has the spirit and the skills and leadership to bring us all together.' The centre's self-evaluation provides clear evidence of the leaders' ambition but little detail of specific or measurable targets to improve health, for instance. The advisory board plays virtually no part in the development of the centre's self-evaluation, although it is playing an increasing role in the action planning process and shaping of services.



The new leaders have built a strong network of supportive partners who have a wealth of expertise, experience and skills. Increasingly effective partnerships with health professionals are supporting the improving picture in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families. Sustainable improvements have been made under the new leadership, for instance, user engagement is widening and parents are now represented on the advisory board. There are high levels of parent satisfaction, leaders have developed significant partnerships and they have introduced clear lines of accountability.

Safeguarding practice and guidance is a strong aspect of the work of the centre. It is underpinned by the way staff work collaboratively and positively with relevant agencies to safeguard to promote the welfare of all children and families. The centre has a robust recruitment and selection process for staff and volunteers. All staff have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. They have a depth of safeguarding knowledge and use this to good effect as they support families living with domestic violence, drug and alcohol dependency, and mental ill-health. As a result of staff's expertise and non-judgemental approaches to their work, families report that the support they receive is invaluable and helps them to regain their emotional well-being.

The centre plays a key role in celebrating diversity and difference within the community. Annual community events, for example the Diversity celebration and Party in the Park, are hugely successful and attended by the majority of the community. These are significant events within the community and have led to greater involvement of families and local organisations in the planning and delivery of the events. The centre is very inclusive and there is some positive provision for families in greatest need. Target groups are well represented but the majority of children with disabilities and special needs living in the area are not well served in the centre. There are too many families living in the reach area who are not accessing the centre on a regular basis.

The centre manages available resources appropriately and they have a positive impact as reflected in the satisfactory and improving outcomes. As a result the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated,</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

Darlaston Children's Centre nursery, reference number EY338475, was inspected on 5 March 2012. The overall effectiveness of the nursery was judged to be good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Darlaston Children's Centre on 23–24 May 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to come in and meet with us and tell us about your centre. We can see that you appreciate the support and advice the staff give you and that you love meeting other parents and making new friends. Many of you said how safe and happy you and your children felt at the centre and that staff are always friendly and helpful. The safeguarding arrangements are good because of the staff's determination to promote and protect the well-being of children and families. Centre staff are very good at helping parents to keep their homes as safe as possible and we know several of you have had home and fire safety checks.

Health outcomes in the area are poor despite the positive range of health initiatives in place or being piloted in the area. We have asked the centre to do all it can to support the improved health of children and families, especially to make sure children are a healthy weight and that more mums breastfeed their babies to give them a healthier start.

The centre is providing you with important support at times of crisis and staff and partner agencies are helping you to manage your money, cope with debt and resolve

housing issues. It is good to know that a few of you are volunteering at the centre. There are some opportunities for you to improve your qualifications but we have asked the centre leaders to ensure you are able to access a wide range of training activities to support your learning ambitions and support your path to employment.

Children are making good progress in the centre's nursery and they also enjoy the well-managed 'stay and play' sessions. Those of you who attend the 'stay and play' sessions with your children join in your child's play and develop your knowledge and understanding of how children learn.

We have seen that the care, support and guidance the centre provides are good. Several parents told us how staff never judge anyone but are always welcoming and supportive. Several of you have regular home visits from the Family Support Worker which you say have been much appreciated in times of crisis. We saw how well the centre staff work with other partners, for example the local schools to support children's transitions to school and to improve pupils' attendance. There are an increasing number of positive services and activities being provided by the centre but not all families with young children in the area come to the centre. We have asked the centre staff to reach out to more families and especially those who have children with disabilities and special needs so that they too can enjoy coming to the centre. We have also asked the senior leaders to actively promote the work of the centre and the services and activities on offer in order to attract more families into the centre.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection. It was good to meet you all and we wish you all the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).